

# How to Develop Leadership Culture for Awakening

THE  
AWAKENING  
LIBRARY



## **THE AWAKENING LIBRARY**

Why We Need Awakening

What Is Awakening?

How to Pray for Awakening

How to Host a Meeting with God

How to Minister in Prayer

How to Prepare for Outpouring

How to Lead Worship for Encounter with Jesus

How to Develop Leadership Culture for Awakening

How to Cultivate Relationships  
That Sustain Awakening

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The Awakening Library represents collected learnings from more than a decade of ministry as Seedbed and New Room. These pieces have been contributed by writers, leaders, and practitioners in fellowship with the goal of providing practical insights for individuals and churches desiring awakening—an encounter with God that both results from and leads to deep wholeness in people, renewal of the church, evangelization of a generation, and transformation of society.

With special thanks to David Thomas for his contribution to this resource.

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# INTRODUCTION

Sowing for a great awakening requires a rethinking of how we lead. Many of us have been trained under leadership principles that bear much greater resemblance to Jack Welch and Simon Sinek than to Jesus and the disciples. Not that these have been altogether bad ideas. It can be a good and productive thing to cast vision, establish strategic plans, get buy-in, set metrics, and forge ahead. Many churches and ministry organizations have been run this way for decades across the American Christian movement. And we have right now in our homes and communities what that kind of leadership culture, shoehorned into the kingdom of God, produces: a culture still in free-fall and a church still weak to face the challenge of our day.

Awakening is led differently, and much more simply and vulnerably. Observe and respond. Consecration over preparation. Walking the narrow ridgeline. Having an eye for the small, and supporting every shoot. Leading from a plurality, beside or behind an emerging leader anytime we can. These are ideas we want to explore together here in this and other booklets in this series, beginning with the primacy of prayer.

# FIND THE EMBERS OF PRAYER— GATHER THEM, JOIN THEM, ELEVATE THEM, AND FAN THEIR FLAME

In the Second Great Awakening, when Charles Finney would enter a town, the first thing he would do was ask, “Who are the praying people in this place?” And that’s the crucial question of the awakening leader. “Who are the intercessors here? Who still carries the burden of prayer?” They may only be a remnant, perhaps burning down at only the pilot light level of faith. They are often outside of the spotlight. But they are likely still around. Beyond your own heart, your first move for developing leadership culture for awakening is to find those who will petition God with you. These are the people who are crying when the world is laughing, those who are burdened while others are at ease. You need men and women, if only one or two, who know that any kingdom mission that does

not demand prayer is not the mission of God. It is only the mission of people attempting the things of God.

If you will gather the intercessors together with you, those embers collected into a fire ring will each burn more brightly and together can create a spark of spiritual movement. We often say that prayer is not the only thing we do to sow for a great awakening. But it is the first thing, and the most important thing. How you gather and join praying people and prioritize time with them will fan their flame. Together, you can unite in crying out to God for an outpouring of the Spirit of prayer in your church. Read together the booklet in the Awakening Library series on *How to Pray for Awakening*. Preach on prayer. Open up additional space in worship for lingering in prayer. And above all, give yourself to prayer.

Perhaps this is the most important point of this booklet, and perhaps this entire series: *now is a moment to fall in love with your closet*. These are days for leaders to discover the satisfaction and power of the hidden place with Jesus. Awakening is led by men and women who have come to understand all of ministry as an errand from the closet, people who know that Jesus is the reward of our renewal hopes.

Our life of prayer is the most important thing about us because it is in secret, where no one but Jesus sees us, that we draw everything for all that matters in this life. As leaders fall in love with obscurity and are set ablaze there in closeness to Jesus, then ignite or gather what embers we find around us, the fire of holy love can begin to burn. Nothing of awakening happens until that happens.



# CHOOSE DESPERATION— CULTIVATE A PRUDENT URGENCY

I remember Sandy Millar telling about how, in his early years as vicar at Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London, he would frequently ask men and women about when they had last seen their grandchildren in church. Honest concern often surfaced from the ensuing conversations, usually leading to parishioners asking Sandy, “What do we need to do?” What Sandy was doing in these exchanges was cultivating urgency. Small moves, yes. Mere banter, no. Awakening leaders speak and act from the crucial posture of a chosen desperation.

We are those who have been seized by the realities of our cultural moment. Duncan Campbell, key voice of the 1949–1952 Hebridean Revival said: “Let us be honest in

the presence of God and get right into the grips of reality. Have I a vision of [our] desperate need? Oh, for a baptism of honesty, for a gripping sincerity that will move us.” Awakening leaders allow ourselves to actually feel the weight of our desperate need for what only God can do, not dodging it or denying it but willfully embracing it. Our climate-controlled, well-provisioned, comfort-zoned circumstances can buffer the actual implications of our being a “sick church in a dying world,” in Leonard Ravenhill’s words. We have to break through all the self-delusion of affluence and ease to see things as they really are.

This is why fasting is such an important spiritual practice of awakening leaders. Fasting is the sacrament of desperation. It is the declaration that we know our God is not our stomach, that we have exegeted our times to understand the urgency right now for being frank and courageous. Just as in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that our heart will follow our treasure, the same is true of our heart for awakening as we fast: our prayer will follow our bodies. When we kneel, prostrate ourselves, and especially when we fast, it is much more difficult to think and pray casually. Fasting helps pierce the veil of self-sufficiency and bring us into the chosen desperation shaping the culture of awakening leaders. And from there we can name reality with clarity and help our communities respond.

# LOVE BOTH THE STUMP AND SHOOT, BUT FAVOR THE SHOOT- CLOCHE EVERY SEEDLING

Howard Snyder has helped us gain some understanding of awakening leadership from the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11 that “a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse” (v. 1). Our churches compared to what they have been in the great awakenings, who we have been in our past, what we are compared to our Wesleyan roots—our churches are like a stump relative to the great oak of righteousness the Bible understands us to be. But awakening is sown from leaders with eyes to see a sprout of new life in that stump.

Stumps are very fertile seedbeds. There is still much life down in the sap of that root system. The decaying and composted old growth inside a stump can support germination. Which is why we keep loving the stumps. We love

the inert, nominal, churchgoing stumps we serve. Because Christ loved the church and gave His life for it. And because stumps hold good soil and carry potential.

But awakening leaders always favor the seedling: we love both, but we favor the shoot. We watch for any small indication, any detectable evidence of what we can see the Spirit growing, and then we put a cloche over it. Cloches are small glass domes that can function as miniature greenhouses, sealing in moisture and protecting what has sprouted until it has sufficient stem strength to stand and grow on its own. Awakening leaders do this all the time: we cloche people. We cloche moves of prayer. We cloche expressions of kingdom passion, any turn we see in someone toward real, biblical Christianity. We get it into a band. We cover and surround and strengthen it with love and intercession. What happened at Asbury University in 2023 was one massive cloche, an institutional greenhouse, over the boldness and faith of their students in the outpouring.

American Christianity loves to use the language of revivals “breaking out,” churches “exploding” with growth and experiencing “massive” expansion. But awakening leaders know, as our Sower’s Creed asserts, that “the tiniest seeds become the tallest trees.” We have eyes for the small, for little shoots coming up from our stumps.

# DEVELOP YOUR TRINITARIANISM— NORMALIZE THE SUPERNATURAL WORKING OF GOD

For decades, American Protestantism could be understood as falling into categories of emphasis. Mainline churches tended to focus on God our Creator. Evangelical fellowships were centered on Jesus. Pentecostal and charismatic congregations highlighted the Holy Spirit. But leaders of awakening know we need all of God in all of life. We want to shape leadership culture that is endowed with bold pneumatology formed by a high Christology.

Awakening leaders understand that wherever in history or in the world today Jesus is building his church, that is happening at the agency of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Our teaching and leading, our planning and spiritual parenting, our intercession and pastoral care are built out

of believing and coming to know that the Spirit-filled life is the Christian life. So, to pray for healing, to thirst for more of God, to press into Jesus for his intervention, to hear his voice, to experience the Spirit's presence palpably—these become routine in our churches, as much as sending out emails or ordering resources.

How we speak of the Spirit's ministry really matters. Boldness and sound exegesis are crucial. But so are a calm and measured demeanor that neither hypes nor hinders expectation that God will really be God in our present reality. We humbly acknowledge in our leadership teams the great need we live under for God to be supernatural among us, forming us to be men and women of holy love for one another and for this world Jesus died to save.

# WALK THE NARROW RIDGELINE

Awakening leadership is the domain of reflective practitioners. It's neither for quick-trigger enthusiasts who run after hype and big numbers nor for ivory tower academics who can parse every historical and theological note of renewal. Awakening leadership requires a wise and experimental attitude that walks the narrow ridgeline of avoiding the ditch of excess on one side and the ditch of fear on the other.

Left unshepherded, revival activity is vulnerable to a commingling of spirit and flesh that can take people down damaging paths. We all know people who have been debilitatingly wounded by church experiences and leaders whose mishandling of kingdom treasures has ranged from the immoderate and unthoughtful to the profoundly confusing and even

abusive. It's no wonder that Jonathan Edwards was the great intellectual luminary of his day, that John Wesley was fluent in six languages. Not that only scholars can be awakening leaders. But no doubt, a strong measure of learning—of Scripture, church history, emotional response, and interpersonal relations—is of great advantage to avoiding the ditch of excess.

Equally important, however, is the capacity to resist the ditch of fear. If we only allow for what we can explain or control in our encounter with God, we will know only limited dimensions of his intent and work in the world. Of course, when the infinite and holy love of God is “poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit,” finite humanity will be overcome by such glory. And this uncontainable nature of awakening can make us want to draw back into what we are familiar with and can readily explain through our well-worn grids and time-tested frameworks. I've been in many settings where fear of letting God be God has diverted a person or community from receiving and sharing in more.

So, we walk the narrow ridgeline. That's best done through continuous discernment in a plurality of leaders, a trusted team of well-vetted voices who have forged a caliber of community that allows for straight-shooting candor and mutual concern. These are leaders who are eager to give away their platforms, men and women who know that Jesus is the reward of this life, not some kind of numerical metric or public acclaim. Leaders who are eager to defer to one another, humble friends of Jesus who are content to serve in their closets—these are the leaders who will keep one another out of the ditches.



# ANTICIPATE PUSHBACK

I don't know who said it, but it's true that the first person to wake up in awakening is the devil. Awakening is always, eventually controversial in some form. Ultimately, no one who thinks they are awake wants to be confronted with the possibility they are, in fact, asleep. Nobody wants to wrestle with the prospect that they are less than who they think they are. Pushback is unavoidable if we press into a real hope for deep wholeness in people, renewal of the church, evangelization of a generation, and transformation of society. So awakening leadership is actually the vocation of rugged Christians, men and women of a kind of identity strength and tenacious *agape* love that can take the heat.

John Wesley venerated this loving toughness in his lay preachers, his “veterans,” telling their stories in *The Arminian* magazine, the main periodical of our movement in its origins. For example, Thomas Mitchell’s parents died when he was only a boy, leaving him to be apprenticed to a mason at the age of fourteen. After a short military career, he encountered the grace of God under the preaching of Charles Wesley and became a Methodist leader. In Guisely, England, after Mitchell preached, a mob chased him throwing stones for two miles. In Lincolnshire, as he preached a man ran up and completely drenched him with white paint from head to toe. “Friendless I am,” he wrote, “for no one dares come near me.”<sup>1</sup> Or Peter Jaco, in his own words:

*We had hardly the necessities of life; so that after preaching three or four times a day, and riding thirty or forty miles, I have often been thankful for a little clean straw, with a canvas sheet, to lie on. Very frequently we had also violent oppositions. At Warrington I was struck so violently with a brick on the breast that the blood gushed out through my mouth, nose, and ears. . . . For many years I was exposed to various other difficulties and dangers. But, having obtained help from God, I continue to this day!*<sup>2</sup>

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1. John Telford, ed., *Wesley’s Veterans: Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Told by Themselves*, Vol. 1 (Schmul Publishers, 1976), 175–85.

2. *Ibid.*, 7–18.

Constant travel, spiritual opposition, controversy, financial strain were the everyday experiences of Wesley's veterans. Most of these awakening leaders built their own chapels and paid for them themselves. We don't know these names Thomas Mitchell or Peter Jaco. But simple people like this—none of them trained as pastors, all of them haunted with self-doubt, temptations to quit, heartbreak of all kinds—these unsophisticated, hardy leaders were the sowers of a great awakening. These were the testimonies that would have been coming into the New Room chapel when it was new. We would be wise as awakening leaders to learn from our forebears and modulate our expectations to anticipate pushback.

# COME TO TERMS WITH CAREERISM— GET BANDED WITH THE LIKEMINDED

“So far as I know myself,” Wesley wrote, “I have no more concern for the reputation of Methodism or my own than for the reputation of Prester John.”<sup>3</sup> We know that the goodness and burden of awakening is not for careerists. Awakening is sown by the company of the misunderstood, the downwardly mobile, the unthanked, the obscure and criticized and burdened. Awakening is pretty messy and costly to people like us who love it and long for it. Reputation is the first thing to go in this kind of praying and leading. Jesus taught that our seeds have to die before

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3. John Wesley, “Letter to Samuel Walker, September 3, 1756,” in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley AM* (Standard Edition), vol. III, ed. John Telford (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 194.

anything will grow (John 12:24). And maybe it comes to mind what it is you may need to bury for awakening to spring up: distraction, pride, an attitude of expertise, self-sufficiency, being on-trend, affluence, avoidance, ease.

New Room is essentially a massive band of bands, leaders of many kinds and stages coming together in fellowship and streams of collaboration. J. D. Walt has said that the world is after “win win” relationships: you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours. But in New Room we’re building “lose lose win” relationships: I’ll lose all I have, and you put what you have on the table, so that together Jesus gets the win.

## TAKE THE LONG VIEW

You may know the story of a young shoe-shop assistant and Sunday school teacher in Chicago named Edward Kimball who had a heart for kids. He spent hours of his free time reaching out to boys in Chicago's inner city sharing the gospel, simply sowing love into their hearts. One of those kids was a boy named Dwight Moody, who became a Christian in 1858 with Edward Kimball's help, and then grew up to be a preacher. In 1879, Dwight Moody was instrumental in the conversion of a young man named F. B. Meyer, who also grew up to become a minister. Meyer in turn led a young man named J. W. Chapman to Christ, who himself became a pastor God used to bring the message of Jesus to a baseball player named Billy Sunday. As an

athlete/evangelist, Sunday once held a revival meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, that continued so long that he invited another evangelist to join him by the name of Mordecai Ham. And it was while Ham was preaching there in Charlotte that a teenager named Billy Graham gave his life to Jesus, through whom God reached more than 200 million all over the earth and untold millions through media with the message of new life in Christ.

It happened across generations, all starting with Edward Kimball's decision to sow love into the lives of some kids on the streets of Chicago. But awakening leaders know that is the nature of awakening. We take a long view of sowing for fruit we may or may not see or taste, sowing for shade we ourselves may or may not ever enjoy, but sowing nevertheless.

If you have any connection to farm life in your background or experience, you can understand how sowing conveys this protracted, generational outlook on the work of God. Because sowing is patient and slow. It's no sure thing. Sowing is humble. Sowing knows we can't make awakening happen any more than we can make a seed germinate.

But we can be honest about our need for awakening. We can posture ourselves to receive it. We can remove impediments to it. And we can cry out to God for it.

That's the leadership culture needed today.

Sow righteousness for yourselves,  
reap the fruit of unfailing love,  
and break up your unplowed ground;  
for it is time to seek the LORD,  
until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

Hosea 10:12

The Awakening Library is a series of  
print and digital resources that represent  
collected learnings of Seedbed and New Room.

This suite of resources shares practical  
experience and accessible teaching with  
Christians seeking to partner with the Holy  
Spirit in sowing for a great awakening.



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